

Note from the Editorial Board

The Challenges of Brexit and COVID

Around Christmas 2020, a deal featuring the “reasonable” divorce between the United Kingdom and the European Union was announced by representatives from both sides. This far-reaching political event—based, from the British side, on an ideology for regaining sovereignty, not shying away from ostentative falsehoods, and taking advantage of sophisticated communication techniques—will cause socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socioenvironmental damage. It contradicts the vision of many British academics who have played a decisive role in the initiation and development of the theory of social quality and its approach worldwide over the past decades. They focused on social justice and the equitable participation of citizens in societies that are sustainable, fair, inclusive, open, and economically vibrant, thus following the contours of the 1997 Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality. This deal consists of a complex web of incalculable agreements that have not been fully negotiated. It is a hastily crafted recipe for a further breakdown of UK–EU relationships.

The editors of this journal realize that this divorce is dramatic for British colleagues, given their ceaseless involvement in this theory and approach. The British prime minister explained that the British people have finally regained their sovereignty, having been freed from the European Court of Justice as patron of the rule of law of all EU member states. But to keep participating in the future of the extensive EU market, the deal assumes that EU standards should still be followed. And what does the sovereignty of separate European countries mean with the increasing interdependencies of societal processes?

From the side of the University of Sheffield and the Liverpool Hope University, a plea was published in March 2017 to renew the original 1997 Amsterdam Declaration. It summarized four critical overlapping challenges that should be coped with. First, neoliberalism has encouraged inequality to grow exponentially and is now the biggest threat to democracy. Second, the European migration crisis caused by war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa has presented all European countries with severe moral and economic challenges. Third, the urgency of the need for action on climate change has reached a crisis level, so that now the societal and environmental futures of all European countries are inextricably bound together. And fourth, there is the rapid rise of populist nationalism across Europe, which has been caused by the exclusion and marginalization of many citizens as well as by government austerity measures.

Today, we can add a fifth challenge, namely that the current COVID pandemic constitutes a global crisis of enormous complexity. It places an additional burden on



the overall sustainability of our world. More than ever, comprehensive approaches are needed to cope with the variety of its unforeseen consequences. This is the rationale behind our decision to dedicate a double issue of this journal to the societal consequences of this pandemic in 2021. With regard to the June 2017 plea of British scholars, we are grateful for their élan and perseverance to continue a debate about our common responsibilities in the light of the above-mentioned five challenges in the context of current societal relationships.

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The Editorial Board